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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001893

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: ELECTIONS 2007 WEEKLY ROUNDUP:
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Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4(b)
and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Argentine opposition candidates are publicly calling on the GOA to invite the OAS to send international observers for the October 28 elections. The opposition's demand is not resonating with the Argentine media or public, and it appears unlikely the GOA will ask for international observers. Kirchneristas celebrated the landslide reelection of Governor Mario Das Neves in Chubut province and the surprise win, albeit not yet certified, of Victory Front (FPV) candidate Jorge Capitanich for governor in Chaco. The second-place finisher in the Cordoba governor's race continues to demand a vote-by-vote recount on the grounds of fraud in that province's September 2 election. The revision of the vote tallies is still underway, and Cordoba's Superior Court ruled on September 18 that a manual recount was neither necessary nor legal in this case. Presidential candidate Elisa Carrio announced her certainty that she will force FPV candidate Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner into a run-off on October 28, however, but local polls do not support her belief. After its defeat in Chubut and possibly Chaco, the Radical party (UCR) is struggling to maintain national relevance in Argentine politics. The Radicals are the main bastion of support for presidential candidate and former Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna. END SUMMARY.

Calls for International Observers

12. (SBU) In response to the alleged fraud in Cordoba's provincial elections (and in Chaco, according to Carrio), center-left leader and presidential candidate Elisa Carrio has called for international observers to monitor the October 28 presidential elections. Carrio has raised the issue on her September 18-21 trip to Washington DC, where she met with Department of State and OAS officials. OAS director of elections monitoring Pablo Gutierrez reportedly told Carrio that it is possible to send the estimated 1200 observers necessary to monitor the October 28 elections, but that the request must come from the GOA. Carrio apparently said that the National Elections Board was meeting on the issue and that she was confident they would resolve to request observers. The National Elections Board was meeting on

September 20 and 21st to discuss the need to request observers, but indications are that the Board is resisting calling for monitors. Press reports indicate that judicial elections authorities feel they can handle the monitoring without outside help.

¶3. (SBU) Other opposition figures have also expressed concern over potential electoral fraud in Cordoba and Chaco. Former Kirchnerista Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna criticized the widely varying polls published prior to both the Cordoba and Chaco elections that predicted wide margins between candidates. He has also called for international observers to monitor the presidential elections and has said he is preparing a formal request to present to the national elections authorities. Center-right leader Ricardo Lopez Murphy said of the alleged fraud, "there is a risk that what happened in Cordoba could happen in the October presidential elections." Governor of San Luis and presidential candidate Alberto Rodriguez Saa said he feels his party, Frejuli, must "take all precautions" to avoid the possibility of fraud in the presidential elections, despite his confidence that his party's observers "will not allow cheating" at voting stations. (Each party is responsible for providing its own elections observers for each voting station. These observers must verify that each vote cast for their party is counted correctly. Most of the opposition parties do not have enough followers to be able to post an official observer at each voting location nationwide, and therefore are concerned that their votes will be under-counted.) The Buenos Aires city Elections Board will hold a meeting on October 2 to analyze requesting observers. Presidential candidates Rodriguez Saa, Carrio, Lavagna, Jorge Sobisch (current governor of Neuquen), Lopez Murphy, and Lavagna have already confirmed their attendance.

Cordoba and Chaco: Still Not Finalized

¶4. (SBU) Second-place finisher in Cordoba, Luis Juez, is still demanding a vote-by-vote recount on the grounds of fraud in that province's September 2 election. His lawyers appealed to the Cordoba Superior Court for judicial intervention, but the court ruled on September 18 that a manual recount was neither necessary nor legal in this case. The court mandated that the review of the voting-station tallies that began on September 6 continue. The court noted that manual recounts can be ordered by the elections observers at each voting station where they detect fraud or irregularities. (Juez's camp reportedly had observers present at each voting station, but they did not signal any irregularities or fraud at the time of vote tallying.) Despite the ruling, Juez held a march in the provincial capital on September 20 to demand a recount. Nominal winner Juan Schiaretti's camp held counter-marches in the capital and other provincial towns.

¶5. (SBU) In Chaco, UCR candidate and second-place finisher in the September 16 gubernatorial race Angel Rozas has announced he will not ask the courts to mandate a manual recount. According to the preliminary review of the voting station tallies, Rozas lost to FPV candidate Senator Jorge Capitanich by 0.39%. Rozas' camp has recognized that there were no complaints of irregularities nor manipulation by the electoral officials or the Correo Argentino, which totals the voting station tallies. Rozas said that according to (unspecified) UCR data, he should be declared the eventual winner by 2,700 votes after the final revision of the voting station tallies. He urged the public not to worry saying, "the system is transparent. There are no possibilities of tricks." Nominal winner Senator Jorge Capitanich, meanwhile, traveled to Buenos Aires to celebrate his presumed victory and have an official photo with President and First Lady Kirchner. Capitanich got his photo, but only after waiting several hours until he was seen by the Kirchners at 9 pm. The final revision of the voting station tallies was stopped on September 20 after Capitanich raised concerns over discrepancies in the computer printouts and screen displays.

The provincial electoral authorities stopped the review indefinitely due to insufficient security as both camps have taken to the streets of Chaco to demonstrate. President of the Chaco electoral board Ramon Avalos has said he does not know when the recount will be finished.

Carrio: "We will have a Run-Off"

¶6. (SBU) Despite what various local polls report, Elisa Carrio announced this week that she remains certain that she will force Cristina Kirchner into a run-off in October. In order to win outright in the first round, Senator Kirchner needs to receive 45% of the vote or 40% with at least a margin of 10 percentage points over the next-closest competitor. All of the local polling firms are reporting that the First Lady's poll numbers indicate she will win in the first round easily, with none of the other candidates able to pull more than 20% of the total votes. However, Carrio insisted in press reports this week that she is leading rival candidate former Kirchnerista Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna by at least ten points -- a fact not reflected in the polling numbers -- and that she will receive enough votes on October 28 to force a run-off against front-runner Cristina Kirchner. Carrio is quoted as saying, "in the published polls, you have to take five points from the official (FPV) party and give them to us." Carrio has not explained how she arrived at these numbers.

UCR: Down for the Count?

¶7. (SBU) For much of the past century, the Radical Civic Union (UCR) alternated with the conservatives and subsequently with the Peronists as one of the dominant political forces in Argentina. After its defeat in Chubut and possibly Chaco provinces, the UCR is struggling to maintain national relevance in Argentine politics. The UCR had enjoyed periods of strong support in Chubut, alternating power with the Peronists since 1983. The 71.64% victory of FPV candidate and incumbent Governor Mario Das Neves over the UCR's 12.59% share of the votes is the party's worst finish since the return of democracy in 1983. However, the apparent defeat in Chaco province is more worrisome to the national party structure, as it was the only Radical governorship not co-opted by Kirchner. Suspicions have emerged that sitting UCR Governor Roy Nikisch, who has publicly maintained his loyalty to the UCR, had secretly made a deal with Kirchner to join the faction that supports President Kirchner, known locally as the K Radicals. Party president Gerardo Morales said of Nikisch, "during the campaign there he attended more campaign events for Peronist mayors than he did for (UCR candidate) Rozas." Chaco was also considered the main bastion of support for presidential candidate Roberto Lavagna, who is running mainly with the UCR's support. Two weeks prior to the gubernatorial elections, Nikisch secured a spot on Lavagna's list as candidate for national senator. Nikisch was eligible for reelection, but was reportedly convinced by the party to cede the UCR candidacy to Rozas, perhaps in exchange for the chance to become senator. One party source admitted in the press that it was naive of the party not to realize Nikisch's changing loyalty after he was received by Kirchner at the Casa Rosada and introduced as a K Radical. In an apparent attempt at retribution for his support of President Kirchner, the UCR expelled Governor of Mendoza and vice presidential running-mate of Cristina Kirchner Julio Cobos from the party.

Comment

¶8. (C) With just six weeks of campaigning left, the national race for president remains uneventful. Former Vice President and Radical leader Chacho Alvarez commented to the

ambassador September 21 how little political activity and debate was taking place, a sad commentary he noted on the weak political parties and the egotism of opposition leaders.

The opposition continues to promote its competitiveness in the October elections, but polling numbers show no significant improvement in their projected votes. Cristina Kirchner remains around 45% in poll measuring intended votes, with Carrio and Lavagna hovering between 10 and 13%. Carrio has managed to keep her name and image in the press with heavy criticisms of the current administration and allegations of corruption. However, the GOA is unlikely to forward to the OAS an official request for election observers. The Kirchner ticket has been bolstered by two more provincial wins and, in the process, apparently deprived Argentina's traditional UCR party of its last executive position and bastion of support. END COMMENT.

WAYNE